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## TALKS ABOUT DECORATION.

## VI.—ROBERT BLUM ON JAPANESE MOTIVES FOR COUNTRY HOUSES.

"It is difficult for me to formulate my ideas on decoration," said Mr. Robert Blum, "because decoration with me is not a matter of thought but of feeling. It would be with that as it would be with painting a picture. If some one should come to me and say, 'I want you to paint me such and such a picture,' I would not take the commission. I could not. If he knew the sort of thing I do, and would say, 'I want a figure,' or 'I want something with trees,' I could be guided so far. 'Very well, I will paint the picture, and you needn't take it unless you like it,' would be my position."

"But how could you apply that to decorative work?"

"If I were a professional decorator I could not. But he has studied the subject from a different point of view. He has his rules, his canons. He knows a certain form will go well here, another will go well there. But I can't work that way. I suppose it's a matter of temperament. For example, I wouldn't make a working drawing of a room I was to decorate for the owner to see."

"Why not?"

"Because I could never be sure I would follow it myself. The little decorative work I have undertaken has been, I may say, on the spur of the moment, a matter rather of feeling and impulse. My commissions have come from men who know the sort of thing I do, and have desired something of it in a decorative way. I did a little room up at Mamaroneck. I was told there the owner 'wants something Japanese—he has a fancy for storks.' I gave him something Japanese, but there are no storks there."

"Tell me, please, how you went to work?"

"The apartment is a dome room in the top of a tower overlooking the Sound. The work was to begin the next day, and I had as yet no plan in my head. It is difficult to describe mental processes. My ideas took the form of cloud forms and wave forms. I went down-town and bought ropes of all sizes and long brass tacks."

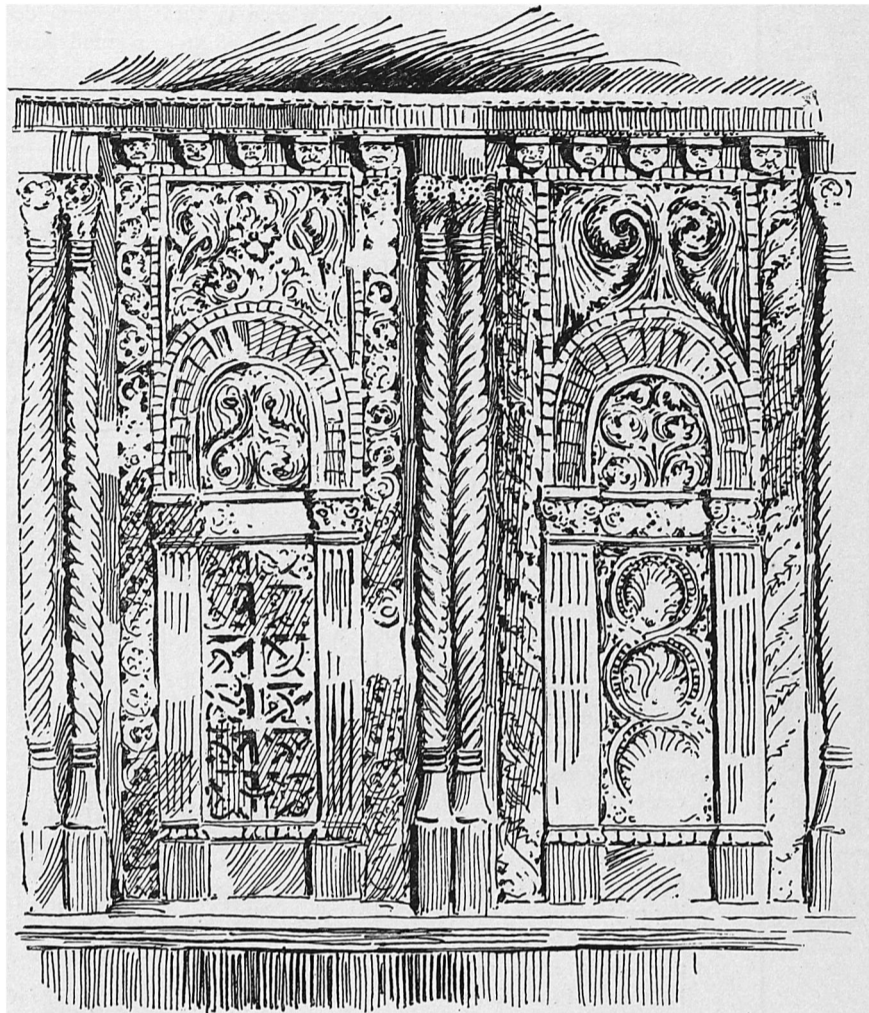
"The connection is not evident. I miss a link."

"Ah, I have formulas and canons sure enough. I do not like flat decoration. I think it is tame and monotonous. Yes, I know the prevailing modern English ideas that decorative color should be flat—that there should be no relief. But there is no nation that has the fine decorative feeling of the Japanese, especially in their plant and animal forms. They never disdain relief. You find modelling in all their work."

"Now do you see the artistic ends of my ropes? I use them to define my forms of cloud and wave—to give me obvious relief. The room has a conical dome. Above the dado the ceiling is covered with canvas. In concentric rings I paint in oil-colors with turpentine these cloud and

wave forms with which Japanese art has made us familiar. These are in neutral tints, with faint flushes of color. You would be surprised to know how light the tints are. Lighted from below, as the room is, they quickly fall into tone, deepening and gathering toward the apex of the dome."

"And the ropes?"



PANELS, BY RICHARDSON, IN A JUDGE'S DESK IN THE COURT OF APPEALS, IN THE NEW CAPITOL, ALBANY, N. Y.

"As I have said, they are of various sizes, and tacked on with the long brass nails they define the forms, and are gilded, silvered or bronzed."

"Instead of storks there are in the crown of the dome three hissing Japanese dragons with gilded heads. These

"That they should have done, but gently; as did roar the joiner's lion, 'not to affright the ladies.' But you can see how the work progressed—not from a set design, but through a feeling of fitness in form and color."

"What accessories would you bring to such a room?"

"I did not furnish it, but I'll tell you what I would have done. The ceiling was rough; there was a feeling of relief. Now, when the eye perceives a rough surface, it casts about for its echo. If it sees round forms, it turns to rest on some kindred form. That is the secret of repose without monotony. Now I would get some of those rich Japanese embroideries that are padded into relief. They might be used in a screen, a sofa or for chairs. Then I would put on the floor a rough, fluffy, Japanese rug. As I have said before, one cannot prescribe these things in cold blood. I should search for what my feeling would tell me was appropriate."

"You find Japanese decoration suggestive for country and seaside?"

"Yes. No people, in some respects, have come so near to nature. They bring us its spirit, I had almost said, soul. Another room—the most important work I did—was Japanese in feeling, although I don't think any one would have traced the two rooms to the same hand."

"What was the room?"

"A dining-room. It was wainscoted six feet high with dark wood. Above that was my frieze—a frieze over five feet deep of coarse burlap, sized and covered with a white absorbent wash as a preparatory ground."

"What was the motive?"

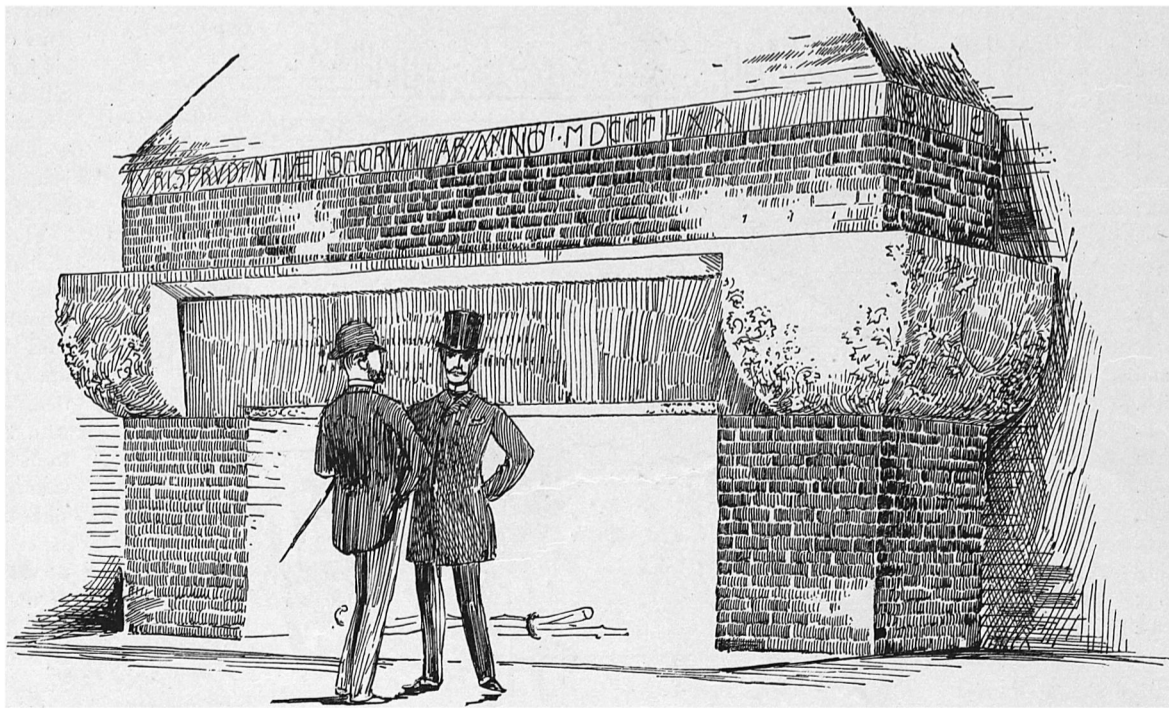
"Sprays, branches of apple-blossoms painted broadly and simply grays and pinks, with flights of birds varying the forms of flower and branch."

"What was the ground?"

"The room was long, lighted only from one end. The other end was inevitably dark. The color, then, required some balancing. The dark end of the room I laid in gold to get all the light I could. Along the sides I introduced blue, which, as it approached the windows, melted into yellow. The result, I think, was successful. Unhappily, the room

is not furnished properly. The frieze should be left unbroken. The furniture, buffets and dressers should be low. On the contrary, they are lofty structures, and break the lines of the frieze."

"The decoration, I should say, was specially made portable. The canvas was placed on stretchers, and at any time it can be removed. This, by the way, is a good idea for country houses. If a man does not own his cottage, yet wants to surround himself with some adornment during the summer, decorations of this sort could be made in panels, easily portable, or to roll up, so that any country workman can adjust them. One can also buy at the Japanese stores a variety of readily adjustable objects, which are admirably suited to temporary use. The bead and bamboo portières; the graceful Japanese lattice work; hangings, panels and kakemonos will at once suggest themselves."



FIREPLACE, BY RICHARDSON, IN AUSTIN HALL, HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

heads are modelled, and the foundation for them, I will confess, is made of shells from the Sound."

"I have seen the room. The decoration certainly is striking and original. I remember how those dragons hissed."

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